

this bill, but, in fact, takes a full step backward and undoes that which we have done in past bills, even during the time that the Republicans were in control of the House.

What we do here is ensure that a contractor does not receive a cost advantage by not offering a health plan, or offering an inferior health plan or retirement plan to its employees, assuring appeals rights for Federal employees in cases of privatization decisions that adversely affect them just as contractors currently have appeal rights, and ensuring that OMB doesn't direct or request agencies to conduct competitions if they otherwise would choose not to.

This is really just an unnecessary amendment. It is directed at destroying the last bit of opportunity the Federal employees have for full protection. That has to be made clear. There is no need for this amendment other than to try to outsource everything and destroy the Federal workforce.

We all have great respect for our Federal employees. Throughout the history of this Congress and in recent years, we've worked in a bipartisan fashion to reduce spending here and there, but this just goes at the heart of this assault that this administration has on Federal employees. And for that reason, and so many others, I urge a strong "no" vote on this amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I respect the gentleman's comments.

I, too, have respect, as well we all do, for all Federal employees. But this is serious business. Spending the taxpayers' money is serious business. And outsourcing does one thing, private contracting does one thing: It provides for an opportunity to save hard-earned taxpayer money.

The majority says that they oppose and fight adamantly as they oppose no-bid contracts. So how can it be consistent to oppose a competitive contracting process that allows private firms the opportunity to have outsource contracts?

This is a commonsense amendment. I offer it on behalf of the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SESSIONS).

I urge my colleagues to support this commonsense, fiscally responsible amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The Acting CHAIRMAN. The gentleman is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Chairman, I simply want to congratulate the gentleman for at least being willing to stay here and debate the amendment tonight. It's more than I can say for a whole lot of other people, and I respect him for that. Let me say, however, that I don't have quite as much high regard for his amendment.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Will the gentleman yield? It is Mr. SESSIONS' amendment.

Mr. OBEY. Well, whoever. I have minimum high regard for it, let me put it that way.

Mr. Chairman, I think we need to fully understand what is afoot with respect to contracting.

I want to cite some other facts, because there is an inexorable and stealthy effort to put much of the activities of government in the hands of contractors rather than in the hands of public servants. And more and more of that contracting is being provided in a noncompetitive manner. That also applies to many, many grants being provided by the executive branch.

For example, the Congressional Research Service documented an unusually large number of sole-source grants issued by the Employment and Training Administration within the Department of Labor, which resulted in 90 percent of discretionary funds for the High Growth Job Training Initiative being awarded on a noncompetitive basis over a 5-year period. It isn't just Halliburton and Blackwater who are getting lots of taxpayers' dollars in a noncompetitive fashion.

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The administration's use of contracting has increased significantly in the past 5 years. For example, the Department of Health and Social Services' contract obligations have nearly doubled from \$5 billion in fiscal year 2001 to \$8.7 billion in fiscal year 2006. The number of contract employees at the Department of Health and Social Services exceeds 32,000, about half the number of Civil Service employees. A significant share of those contracts were awarded on a noncompetitive basis.

In fiscal year 2006 alone, Health awarded nearly 21,000 contracts worth more than \$1.9 billion with less than full and open competition. That is four times the total amount of congressionally directed earmarks that are expected to eventually be included in the Labor, Health, Education appropriation bill.

I won't even bother to get into what has been happening at the Education Department where local school districts have virtually been blackmailed into accepting contracts with book publishers preferred by the administration or else they are frozen out of the program entirely.

So I would simply say I think the gentleman's amendment is ill-advised, and when the time comes late tomorrow evening, I would hope that we will have a "no" vote on the amendment.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIRMAN. The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. PRICE).

The question was taken; and the Acting Chairman announced that the noes appeared to have it.

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Chairman, I demand a recorded vote.

The Acting CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on the amendment offered by the gentleman from Georgia will be postponed.

The Clerk will read.

The Clerk read as follows:

SEC. 739. (a) The adjustment in rates of basic pay for employees under the statutory pay systems that takes effect in fiscal year 2008 under sections 5303 and 5304 of title 5, United States Code, shall be an increase of 3.5 percent, and this adjustment shall apply to civilian employees in the Department of Homeland Security and shall apply to civilian employees in the Department of Defense who are represented by a labor organization as defined in 5 U.S.C. 7103(a)(4), and such adjustments shall be effective as of the first day of the first applicable pay period beginning on or after January 1, 2008. Civilian employees in the Department of Defense who are eligible to be represented by a labor organization as defined in 5 U.S.C. 7103(a)(4), but are not so represented, will receive the adjustment provided for in this section unless the positions are entitled to a pay adjustment under 5 U.S.C. 9902.

(b) Notwithstanding section 712 of this Act, the adjustment in rates of basic pay for the statutory pay systems that take place in fiscal year 2008 under sections 5344 and 5348 of title 5, United States Code, shall be no less than the percentage in paragraph (a) as employees in the same location whose rates of basic pay are adjusted pursuant to the statutory pay systems under section 5303 and 5304 of title 5, United States Code. Prevailing rate employees at locations where there are no employees whose pay is increased pursuant to sections 5303 and 5304 of title 5 and prevailing rate employees described in section 5343(a)(5) of title 5 shall be considered to be located in the pay locality designated as "Rest of US" pursuant to section 5304 of title 5 for purposes of this paragraph.

(c) Funds used to carry out this section shall be paid from appropriations, which are made to each applicable department or agency for salaries and expenses for fiscal year 2008.

SEC. 740. Unless otherwise authorized by existing law, none of the funds provided in this Act or any other Act may be used by an executive branch agency to produce any prepackaged news story intended for broadcast or distribution in the United States, unless the story includes a clear notification within the text or audio of the prepackaged news story that the prepackaged news story was prepared or funded by that executive branch agency.

SEC. 741. None of the funds made available in this Act may be used in contravention of section 552a of title 5, United States Code (popularly known as the Privacy Act) or of section 552.224 of title 48 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

SEC. 742. Each executive department and agency shall evaluate the creditworthiness of an individual before issuing the individual a government travel charge card. Such evaluations for individually-billed travel charge cards shall include an assessment of the individual's consumer report from a consumer reporting agency as those terms are defined in section 603 of the Fair Credit Reporting Act (Public Law 91-508): *Provided*, That section 604(a)(3) of such Act shall be amended by adding to the end the following:

"(G) executive departments and agencies in connection with the issuance of government-sponsored individually-billed travel charge cards."

Provided further, That the department or agency may not issue a government travel charge card to an individual that either